

Questions and Answers – 19 Dec 01 RIF, Benefits and Services Briefing

Question: Is grade the controlling factor in the retention standing over all things, like tenure, subgroup and Adjusted Service Computation Date (SCD) for RIF? Example, if a WG-11 is displaced and needs to go the 10 level, does *grade of the employee* take precedence over all the other RIF factors?

Answer:

The Grade of an employee who is a participant in a RIF scenario does play a part due to the fact that it provides an employee more opportunities for placement into a higher grade range than someone in a lower grade position. For example, a WG-11 employee would be looked at for positions down to the 8 level, whereas a WG-7 employee would only be able to be placed into a 6, 5 or 4 level position, should there be available considerations for "bumping" or "retreating" entitlements.

Also, the displaced WG-11 employee that was suggested as an example can only bump a WG-10 employee if that WG-10 employee has a lower tenure subgroup (i.e., IIA can **bump** a IIB WG-10 level employee). However, if there are no II (Career Conditional employees) within the list of WG-10's, then the WG-11 can be looked at for the descending grades (9 and 8) to see if a lower tenure and/or subgroup individual exists at those levels and displace them through the bumping process.

However, if they have *retreat* rights to a position they had previously held at a prior time that is not more than 3 grade levels below their current position, they can displace another individual within the same tenure subgroup (ie. IIA to IIA as long as the displaced employee has a higher SCD (i.e., an SCD of 10-24-69 can displace an employee with an SCD of 11-08-76 and both be in IIA tenure subgroup).

Should neither of the above placement action options exist, and then the WG-11 employee would ultimately receive a RIF separation notice, unless they are able to be placed into a current vacancy for which they qualify or be possibly placed into another activity that is co-located on Fort Detrick, etc.

Another consideration is that positions may be two-grade interval positions as opposed to one-grade and that will make a difference in their assignment considerations. For example, a Contract Specialist 11 position may be able to "bump" or "retreat" to the GS-5 level because these positions progress by 2-grade intervals 5, 7, 9 and 11.

Question: Can a Wage Supervisor bump into a non-supervisory wage grade position?

Answer: Yes, process would be similar to example above. Also, assignment rights would need to be in regulatory compliance with the normal line of progression in the position from which the supervisory employee is initially assigned. Lower-graded

supervisory positions as well as any leader positions would be considered and then the journeyman level of the position to ensure appropriate assignment consideration is granted.

Question: Can a GS employee bump WG employee and vice versa?

Answer: Yes, as long as the employee possesses the appropriate qualifications for the position assignment.

Question: Can an adversely affected employee register early for the Priority Placement Program (PPP)?

Answer: The following conditions need to be met before *early PPP registration* can be authorized:

- a. Employees may not register unless they are scheduled to be adversely affected by RIF, or by declination of reassignment or Transfer of Function (TOF) outside the commuting area;
- b. The referral priority of each individual must be determined;
- c. The timing may not conflict with any registration dates set by a higher headquarters within the component, e.g., those contained in the approved reduction or realignment plan; and
- d. Registration must be offered to all similarly affected employees."

With our A76 situation and all the "unknown factors" involved, it appears that this would not be an option for USAG. We would be unable to meet conditions "a" or "b" until a determination as to the A76 impact on affected employees is determined.

Additionally, the initial CA decision could be overturned during the subsequent 4-6 month appeal period. Also, during the 4-6 month window, Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) candidates are identified and made offers for retirement. Once decisions are rendered on the appeals, the formal RIF occurs two-to-three months later, so the list of eligible PPP candidates can not be locked-down until appeals are exhausted, VERA candidates are confirmed and the RIF is executed. Therefore, PPP registration cannot occur until the start of the RIF process, right after RIF letters are issued to employees. It should be noted that if there were "no" protests to the Government Accounting Office (GAO), then the appeal window would last approximately two months.

Question: What is our PPP Zone; can an employee expand or restrict the zone at initial registration?

Answer: PPP Zone for Fort Detrick US Army Garrison is Zone 1, which includes the states of NY, PA, WV, MD, VA, DE, NJ, CT, RI, MA, NH, VT, and ME. The action being taken such as separation or change to lower grade, etc. determines the area that can be considered for PPP registration. An employee scheduled for a change-to-lower grade-RIF action is restricted to DOD activities within their commuting area, whereas employees with separation notices due to RIF may register within their zone for the minimum number of activities nearest their duty station likely to provide a reasonable opportunity for placement and initial area of referral must include the registering activity if the employee is located in the commuting area of that activity. Activities in an adjoining zone that are no more distant from the employee's duty station than the furthest activity selected in the zone may be also be included in the initial area of referral without prior PPP CARE office approval. Registration outside the employee's commuting area is voluntary. Subsequent declination of a valid offer outside the commuting area, which does not terminate severance pay entitlements, will make the employee a mandatory registrant for the commuting area. Anyone eligible for severance pay entitlements due to a RIF is a mandatory registrant in PPP.

Individuals who register only for activities within their commuting area may not expand their area of referral after separation without prior approval from the PPP Care Office.

Question: If I elect severance pay during the RIF, can I still retire prior to my separation date? Can I still retire at a future date (e.g. 5 or 10 years later)?

Answer: IF an employee is eligible to retire, they cannot elect severance pay. Deferred Retirement is an option one can take at age 62; however, deductions for age, etc. would be based upon the action taken at the time of separation and would not change over the intervening time period.

Question: If there are no jobs available during the RIF, can an employee be forced into retirement, assuming the employee is retirement eligible?

Answer: No, they can separate and go on PPP for possible placement.

Question: How long can an employee stay on PPP list?

Answer: Until placed, decline a valid offer, or 12 months after the effective date of separation from the permanent position, whichever occurs first. If a position is offered to them that is lower than the grade level they were being separated from, they could then be registered in the Retained Grade "R" program if they meet all the requirements for retained grade/pay entitlements. The DOD Retained Grade Placement Program includes those employees who had placement into a position that was lower than their full entitlements. The intent of this program is to continue to look for job matches to provide the employee with a position comparable to the grade

from which they were displaced. Therefore, if an employee accepts a job at a lower grade, he/she stays on the PPP list for an additional year past the PPP hire date to be considered for vacancies at higher or employee's current grade prior to the RIF.

Question: Can Command request a PPP expert to visit Ft. Detrick and brief employees?

Answer: Command is exploring the possibility of bringing a PPP expert on-site for a briefing as well as a question and answer session.

Question: Will USAG apply for "Restored Leave" authority?

Answer: "Restored Leave" authority is only granted after Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decisions; it is not issued for CA studies.

Question: Can the USAG provide counseling sessions one-on-one with benefits experts, or even group sessions, etc. ?

Answer: This question will be forwarded to the CA Steering Committee as to the feasibility and when it would be a good timeframe, etc. Possibly the ABC Center from Fort Riley, KS may be available to brief on the "how-tos" and questions on retirement issues and the best considerations in respect to the Contracting Out situation. That would have to be a group session; however, it appears that the employees present at the 19 Dec 01 session are really looking for individual counseling and have some adversity to the ABC Center and its workings. As stated at the 19 Dec 01 briefing, the knowledge and resources are not currently available in the CPAC/CPOC to do this effort and the Army Benefits Center was established for this purpose and does have counselors who can be reached telephonically if employees do not have web or email access. We are in the process of contacting the ABC-Center relative to on-site "one-on-one" support that they may provide to the USAG.

Question: Can USAG complete a MOCK RIF early and/or prior to the VERA window to help employees better plan their futures?

Regional CPOCs do not perform Mock RIFs on CA studies as employee current and near-term status could change prior to the formal RIF, thereby affecting the outcome. Additionally, the initial CA decision could be overturned during the subsequent 4-6 month appeal period. Also, during the 4-6 month window, Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) candidates are identified and made offers for retirement. Once decisions are rendered on the appeals, the formal RIF occurs two-to three months later, so the information needed for a MOCK RIF would not be available until appeals are exhausted and VERA candidates are confirmed. Therefore, an early MOCK RIF would not have any value since the formal RIF would occur soon thereafter (within two or three months). It should be noted that if there were "no" protests to the Government Accounting Office (GAO), then the appeal window would last approximately two months.

It should be noted that The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has a reference guide entitled “THE EMPLOYEE’S GUIDE TO BENEFITS FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY REDUCTION IN FORCE”, which is another good source of information relative to continuation of benefits, TSP, retirement information, etc. that may be a valuable resource for our affected employees. The guide can be viewed and/or printed from the Internet at: **<http://www.opm.gov/rif/general/egrifben.txt>**